



Special Education Needs and Inclusive Practices.
An International Perspective.

Bisogni educativi speciali e pratiche inclusive.
Una prospettiva internazionale.

Conference Proceedings

Atti del Convegno

University of Bergamo - Università di Bergamo

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Table of contents - Indice

Introduction – Introduzione <i>F. Dovigo</i>	4
Benvenuti! Un progetto di peer education presso l'ABF di Albino – Bergamo <i>Z. Amidoni, A. Gabellari</i>	26
Bisogni Educativi Speciali o Bisogni Estivi Speciali? Un'indagine sulla perdita di apprendimento dovuta alle vacanze scolastiche <i>G. Asquini, M. Sabella</i>	31
Methodological issues concerning the application of sociometric techniques to examine the social outcomes of inclusion <i>E. Avramidis, C. Kantaraki Thessalia, V. Strogilos</i>	36
Bisogni educativi speciali: esigenze informative e dati disponibili <i>A. Battisti, S. Corradini, L. Martinez</i>	45
Il progetto TRIS e l'inclusione socio-educativa degli studenti impossibilitati alla normale frequenza scolastica <i>V. Benigno, G. Caruso, F. Ravicchio, M. Repetto, G. Trentin</i>	44
La qualità dei processi inclusivi a scuola. Una proposta per l'autovalutazione e l'intervento <i>N. Bianquin, S. Besio</i>	51
L'utilizzo dell'ICF come sfondo integratore scientifico per i processi inclusivi. Il progetto di ricerca nazionale EDUFIBES attraverso la didattica per competenze <i>P. Damiani, F. Gomez Paloma, D. Ianes</i>	56

Strumenti assistivi per studenti non vedenti e ipovedenti: dalla progettazione di lezioni multimediali alla stesura di linee guida per docenti <i>A. De Piano</i>	61
Yoet dice la sua: prendersi cura dei ragazzini migranti in un servizio pubblico di neuropsichiatria infantile <i>A. Galizzi</i>	66
“Inclusiva–mente, storie di qui e lì”. Un’esperienza con gli alunni stranieri <i>C. Gemma, A. Poli</i>	69
Il co-teaching: il valore della collaborazione tra docenti nell’educazione inclusiva <i>E. Ghedin, D. Di Masi, D. Aquario</i>	73
Creare culture inclusive. Una indagine sulle prospettive dei dirigenti scolastici <i>E. Ghedin, G. Scattolin</i>	78
Elementary school children and SEN children’s opinions about learning <i>A. Habók</i>	82
Research on learning to learn among elementary school children and children with special educational needs Research on learning to learn among elementary school children and children with special educational needs <i>A. Habók</i>	87
A cross-cultural comparison of inclusive education in Japan and Italy: Students’ views on inclusive education <i>S. Hashimoto, A. Ruggeri Takeshita, H. Goma</i>	91

Che cosa funziona davvero nella classe inclusiva? Uno studio qualitativo sul territorio nazionale <i>D. Heidrun</i>	94
Transition patterns after inclusive preschool: The educational pathways of children with and without special educational needs in Sweden <i>J. Lundqvist</i>	98
Hellerup Skole di Gentofte (Copenhagen). Una scuola “per tutti” attraverso la “Pedarchitettura”, ossia il dialogo tra pedagogia e architettura <i>M. Marcarini</i>	103
What Can Inclusive Education Do For You? The Case of European Roma <i>M. Miskovic, S. Curcic</i>	109
Due volte speciali. Quando gli alunni con disabilità provengono da contesti migratori <i>C. Martinazzoli</i>	114
Il bilancio tangibile e intangibile dell’inclusione <i>G. Migliaccio</i>	118
Bisogni educativi speciali: formazione e sperimentazione <i>G. Monti</i>	124
L’inclusione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità visiva vent’anni dopo <i>L. Paschetta</i>	128
Narrare per includere a scuola: una ricerca-formazione sull’ “autobiografismo interculturale” <i>L. Perla, N. Schiavone</i>	133

La scrittura professionale degli insegnanti specializzati. Risorsa per un sistema scolastico inclusivo in Puglia <i>L. Perla, N. Schiavone</i>	139
Inclusive values and Finnish educational policy <i>P. Pihlaja, H. Ketovuori, A. Laiho</i>	144
Intensive special educational needs and the development of inclusive practices in Finland <i>R. Pirttimaa, T. Kokko, L. Rätty, E. Kontu, H. Pesonen, T. Ojala</i>	149
Teacher Education for Inclusion <i>A. Rank, M. Scholz</i>	154
The expertise of the music support teacher and workshop- teaching for school inclusion: practices and research data <i>A. L. Rizzo</i>	159
Il disagio “invisibile” dei bambini. Una proposta di personalizzazione educativa nella scuola dell’infanzia <i>V. Rossini</i>	165
Developing a New Scale (TAIS) for the Assessment of Teachers’ Attitudes toward Inclusive Education <i>T. Saloviita</i>	170
Intelligenza Somatica e competenze relazionali. Studio esplorativo di un training psicopedagogico rivolto a un gruppo di studenti di una scuola secondaria di secondo grado <i>R. M. Scognamiglio, S. M. Russo, M. Morbe</i>	174

Inclusione e buone prassi. Uno studio sulla cultura inclusiva condivisa dagli insegnanti <i>M. Striano, N. Rainone, A. Gentile, V. P. Cesarano, B. Galante, A. Cuccurullo</i>	177
Un modello didattico inclusivo context-oriented. Deviazioni sull'osservazione dei BES <i>A. Tigano</i>	181
Percorso sperimentale di accompagnamento degli insegnanti nell'integrazione di studenti con bisogni educativi speciali - prima fase <i>D. Tonelli, S. Di Crisci, R. Santuliana</i>	187
Collaborative Assessment of Social Inclusive Contexts <i>V. Vinci</i>	192
Aesthetic perspective on students' learning: using non-academic literature in a dialogic classroom to foster inclusive teacher education <i>R. Zakirova Engstrand, B. Ernberg, H. Knutes</i>	197

Research on learning to learn among elementary school children and children with special educational needs

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Keywords

Elementary school children, Learning to learn, Questionnaire

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Learning to learn is one of the basic competencies for lifelong learning. Learning and well developed learning skills are required in a rapidly changing, globalized world. Lifelong learning is a significant component in the lives of both children and

adults. It becomes clear from a review of the different approaches to learning to learn that the notion of learning to learn was interpreted in a broad sense a few decades ago and that a more detailed definition has developed in recent decades as learning to learn has been placed among the key competencies (Education Council 2006, Hoskins and Fredriksson 2008). Current research projects are based on the cognitive, affective and metacognitive dimensions of learning. The cognitive dimension focuses on information processing, knowledge creation and resolving learning difficulties (Hoskins and Fredriksson 2008). The affective dimension analyses learning-related attitudes and beliefs which include context-related and self-related beliefs as well as social skills, motivation, confidence, application of learning strategies, organisation of own learning time and information management (Hautamäki, Hautamäki and Kupiainen 2010). The metacognitive dimension comprises awareness of learning, active reflection and learner monitoring during the learning process (Hoskins and Fredriksson 2008).

Next, I wish to point out some research projects related to learning to learn. The Finnish L2L framework has made an important contribution to our understanding of L2L (Hautamäki et al 2002). More intensive research started in the 1990s, whose main goal was “to develop a system for the evaluation of the effectiveness of education” (Kupiainen and Hautamäki 2006, 36). A number of research projects have been carried out in recent decades to evaluate schoolchildren’s learning. The Campaign for Learning research project was designed by a team

from Durham University, Newcastle University's Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Institute of Education at London University. More than 30 primary and secondary schools and about 150 teachers took part in this large-scale project. The results have been published in numerous case studies, reports, books, and journals (see e.g. Wall 2008). Another programme from Britain is Learning How to Learn. The focus of the programme is mainly on "how to learn" and the reflective, strategic, rhetorical, instructional and collaborative aspects of learning. The learner is not only examined from the perspective of the individual but also from that of the learning context. The role of peers and teachers is also explored (James et al 2007).

Methods

The Learning to Learn research project was started in 2009 (see. e. g. Habók 2013ab). Measurement tools were developed for children in Years 1–6. In the present study, I focus on children in Years 1–4. A self-developed questionnaire about learning was used along with semi-structured questions. In the present study, I present the questionnaire results. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face to address children's questions and to deal with any statements that they could not understand or misunderstood. Children with special educational needs (SEN) are integrated into common school classes in Hungary. Just a very low number of children attend special programmes or institutes where children are taught separately. For that reason, a sample was formed out of children with special educational needs and typically developing chil-

dren. As regards the sample, 29 SEN children and 30 other children participated in the research (Year2SEN=6; Year3SEN=10; Year4SEN=13; Year1others=42; Year2others=12; Year3others=10; Year4others=14).

Results

The questionnaire contained the following fields: effort and perseverance, self-efficacy, support, critical thinking, attitude towards school, attitude towards learning, self-concept and learning strategies. As regards effort and perseverance, answers were sought as to how much work children put into learning, whether they carry on learning when the material is difficult and how important learning is for them. In the field of self-efficacy, children were asked whether they understand the most difficult learning material, how successfully they perform school tasks and what they think about their own learning achievement. I was also interested in the question of who provides support for children: teachers, peers and/or parents. In the field of critical thinking, data was collected on what children think about their errors and mistakes and whether they accept being corrected. I wanted to determine what children think about school, how effective a place it is for learning and how interesting and useful the information they learn in school is. Children were also asked what they suppose their teachers' beliefs about them are as individuals. As regards self-concept, children were asked what they think about themselves as people. Finally, information was collected about children's learning strategies. The results are presented in Table 1.

	SEN children (%p)	Other children (%p)	p<
Effort and perseverance	79	86	n.s.
Self-efficacy	63	73	.05
Support	62	60	n.s.
Critical thinking	67	68	n.s.
Attitude towards school	93	94	n.s.
Attitude towards learning	83	83	n.s.
Self-concept	72	69	n.s.
Learning strategies	71	71	n.s.

Table 1. Children's questionnaire results

As regards the whole sample, no significant differences were detected for self-efficacy between SEN children and the other part of the sample. It was found that SEN children place a lower value on their self-efficacy. The main difference was that SEN children placed a lower value on the idea that their school achievement depends on them as individuals.

Results were also analysed by Year, but no significant differences were found.

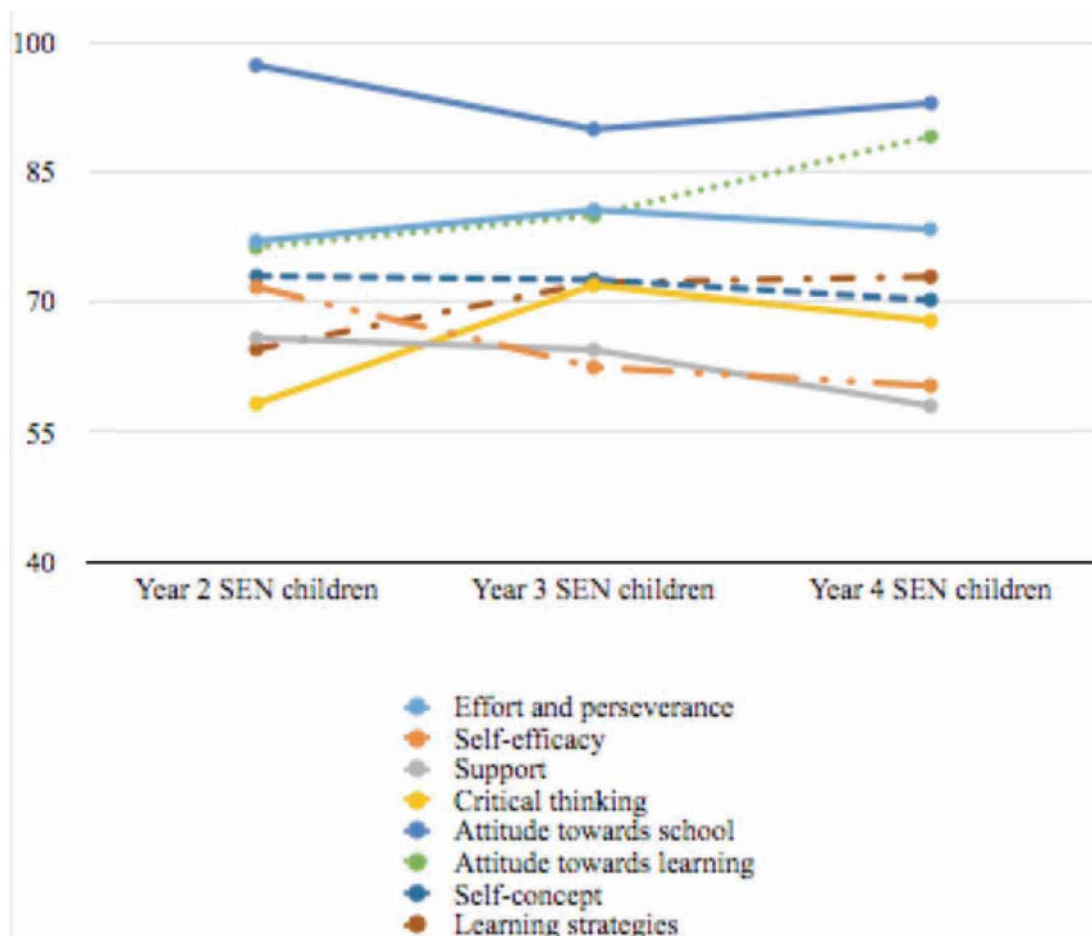


Figure 1. SEN children's questionnaire results (%p)

Children evaluate their school attitude the highest. 90% of the children think that school is a very effective place for learning and that they learn useful and important information there. Children rated effort and perseverance as well as attitude towards learning the highest, while they ranked the role of the support they received the lowest. Children's results were also analysed.

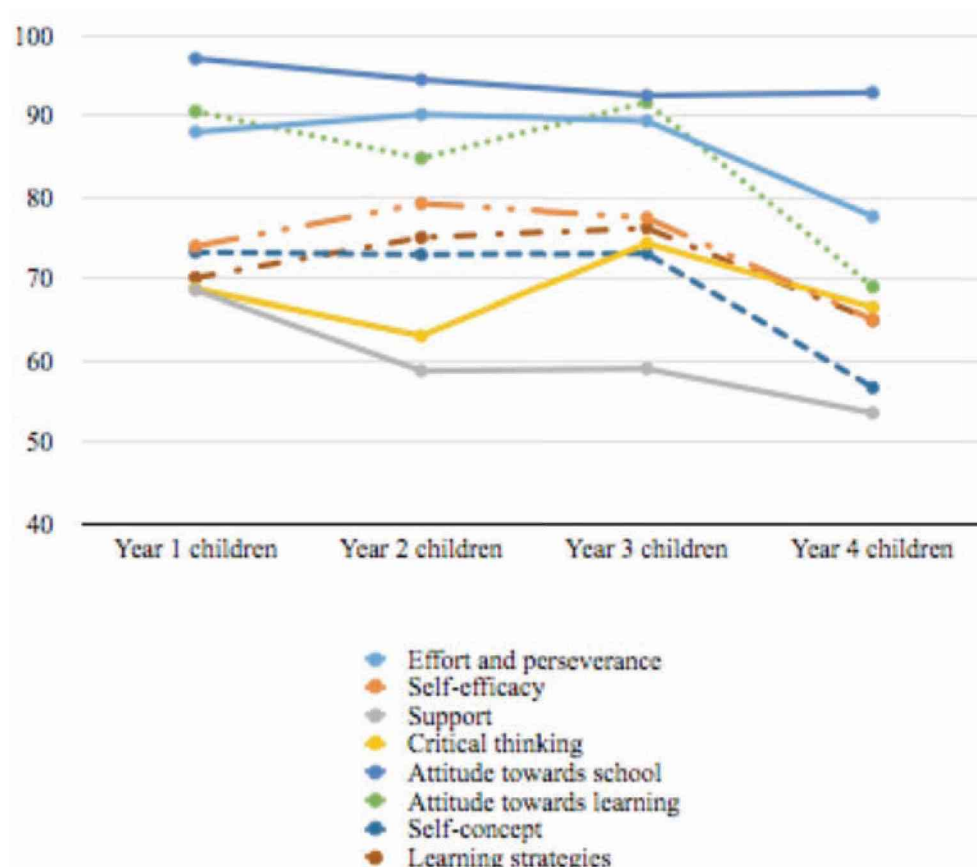


Figure 2. Children's questionnaire results by Year (%p)

In a comparison of results by Year, differences were found in the field of effort and perseverance (FANOVA=3.937, $p<.05$), self-efficacy (FANOVA=3.587, $p<.05$), attitude towards learning (FANOVA=5.697, $p<.01$) and self-concept (FANOVA=4.082, $p<.05$). Similar results were found for SEN children; namely, children rated their attitude towards school high. However, attitude towards learning showed a decreasing tendency, as did effort and perseverance. In this case, children evaluated support they received lower than other fields.

To sum up, learning to learn is clearly a highly complex notion. Related projects examine this issue from different perspectives. To provide a complex overview of children's learning, the cognitive, affective and metacognitive dimensions must be analysed. In the present study, children's views on learning are presented. This approach may be connected to the affective dimension; however, children had to consider or even reconsider their own learning during the data collection. Hence, they had to monitor and use their metacognitive skills in evaluating their own learning. On the whole, SEN children and the other children did not show considerable differences. No significant differences were found between SEN children and typically developing children, except in self-efficacy. SEN children's results were consistent. The next task for the future is to track children's results over time. Moreover, when the necessity of intervention is ascertained, this information will be provided to teachers.

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